

Subject-Verb Agreement A

Number is the form a word takes to indicate whether the word is singular or plural.

- 8a.** When a word refers to one person, place, thing, or idea, it is **singular** in number. When a word refers to more than one person, place, thing, or idea, it is **plural** in number.

SINGULAR lesson, box, child, him, each

PLURAL lessons, boxes, children, them, many

EXERCISE A Above each of the following words, write *S* for *singular* or *P* for *plural*.

Examples 1. woman ^S

2. women ^P

1. cases ^P

2. us ^P

3. clock ^S

4. book ^S

5. pencil ^S

6. stereos ^P

7. them ^P

8. wish ^S

9. mice ^P

10. knuckle ^S

11. feet ^P

12. she ^S

13. few ^P

14. spoons ^P

15. pin ^S

16. lemon ^S

17. plate ^S

18. tribes ^P

19. shelves ^P

20. yam ^S

EXERCISE B On the lines provided, write the plural form of each of the following words.

Example 1. chicken chickens

21. person persons or people

22. dentist dentists

23. cup cups

24. audience audiences

25. reporter reporters

26. hawk hawks

27. actor actors

28. cow cows

29. scientist scientists

30. potato potatoes

Subject-Verb Agreement B

8b. A verb should agree in number with its subject.

singular subject — verb (s)
plural subject (s) — verb

USAGE

(1) Singular subjects take singular verbs.

(2) Plural subjects take plural verbs.

When a sentence contains a verb phrase, the first helping verb in the verb phrase agrees with the subject.

EXAMPLES Our favorite **sport is** soccer. [The singular verb *is* agrees with the singular subject *sport*.]

We have been playing soccer in the park. [The plural helping verb *have* agrees with the plural subject *We*.]

EXERCISE A In each of the following sentences, underline the verb in parentheses that agrees with its subject.

Example 1. Soccer (is, are) the world's most popular team sport.

1. Our cat (like, likes) to watch television with us, especially the nature shows.
2. All the students (enjoy, enjoys) the reading assignment every week.
3. Before he became a lawyer, my uncle Nacio (was, were) a high-wire performer in the circus.
4. This music (has, have) elements of harmony that are very complex.
5. (Is, Are) Rafael usually first in line for every new movie in town?
6. As the final plot twist is revealed, the reader (start, starts) to understand why the butler left the French doors open.
7. My mother (prefer, prefers) a good book to a good movie.
8. Many passersby (are, is) curious about the mysterious building being constructed downtown.
9. Before they leave for vacation, the women (ask, asks) their neighbors to look after their house.
10. The grass (is, are) always greener after a good rain.

EXERCISE B In each of the following sentences, underline the helping verb in parentheses that agrees with its subject.

Example 1. Jacob (has, have) been exploring a salt marsh.

11. Over the past year, Jonelle (has, have) been collecting articles about Olympic gymnasts.
12. I read that the English actor Ralph Fiennes (is, are) appearing in *Hamlet* this season in London.
13. (Do, Does) she know yet about the letter from her brother?
14. They (has, have) been thinking about adopting a dog for some time now.
15. Certainly Mr. Iwaye (do, does) understand the importance of meeting the deadline.

Subject-Verb Agreement C

- 8c.** The number of a subject is not changed by a phrase or clause following the subject.

EXAMPLES This **collection** of myths and legends **is** fascinating.

The **flowers** that I planted in the front yard **are** in need of water.

EXERCISE A In each of the following sentences, underline the verb in parentheses that agrees with its subject.

Example 1. The book in which I found these facts and figures (belongs, *belong*) to Ms. Najera.

1. The last people off the ship (carry, *carries*) their own luggage.
2. This anthology of short stories (*include*, includes) at least one story by Charles Baxter.
3. Songs about love often (*make*, makes) me cry.
4. Jim's brother, who is an art director for television sitcoms in Hollywood, (is, *are*) a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
5. The demolition of a skyscraper always (*draw*, draws) a crowd.
6. At the end of the story, the king of the birds (*declare*, declares), "I grant the eagle's request!"
7. The solution to all of our problems (is, *are*) to start the project over again from scratch.
8. The potatoes from the garden (*was*, were) peeled before they were put into the pot.
9. Two types of salad (*was*, were) served first.
10. The sound of the passing ships (*echo*, echoes) through the fog.

EXERCISE B In each of the following sentences, circle the subject of the verb in parentheses. Then, underline the verb in parentheses that agrees with the subject.

Example 1. My favorite (book) of short stories (is, *are*) *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* by Edgar Allan Poe.

11. The (students) in my karate class (watch, *watches*) carefully whenever the instructor demonstrates a move.
12. The (jar) of lima beans (*was*, were) stored in the coolest section of the cellar.
13. The birthday (cards) that I received this year (*is*, are) mostly from out of town.
14. The two (men), who both work the third shift at the police department, (*sleep*, sleeps) during the day.
15. The (judges) on the panel (decide, *decides*) which skaters will continue to the semifinals.

Subject-Verb Agreement D

- 8d.** The following indefinite pronouns are singular: *anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, nothing, no one, one, somebody, someone, and something*.

EXAMPLE **Everyone** **is** responsible for bringing his or her own lunch.

- 8e.** The following indefinite pronouns are plural: *both, few, many, and several*.

EXAMPLE **Both** of the girls **excel** at basketball.

- 8f.** The indefinite pronouns *all, any, more, most, none, and some* may be singular or plural, depending on their meaning in a sentence.

Often, the object in a prepositional phrase that follows the pronoun indicates whether the pronoun is singular or plural. Usually, if the object of the preposition is singular, the pronoun is singular. If the object is plural, the pronoun is plural.

EXAMPLES **Some** of the carrots **have** been sliced. [*Some* refers to the plural object *carrots*.]
Some of the salad **is** in the refrigerator. [*Some* refers to the singular object *salad*.]

EXERCISE Circle the indefinite pronoun in each of the following sentences. Then, underline the correct form of the verb in parentheses.

Example 1. (Most) of the cups (was, were) unbroken after the earthquake.

1. (Something) about the candidate's answers (has, have) been bothering me ever since the debate.
2. (Both) of the dogs (has, have) already been treated for heartworm.
3. (All) of the stuff in the attic (need, needs) to be dusted before the yard sale.
4. (Neither) of the movies (is, are) very good.
5. (Have, Has) not (several) of these dogs already won awards?
6. (Everybody) who is registered for the class (read, reads) the same books.
7. (No one) in the play (was, were) prepared for the overwhelming response of the audience on opening night.
8. (Is, Are) any of the dough ready to be baked?
9. The director is pleased that (more of) the singers (have, has) memorized the score for this rehearsal than for the last rehearsal.
10. (Somebody) among the reporters covering the trial (is, are) getting inside information from the district attorney.

Subject-Verb Agreement E

- 8d.** The following indefinite pronouns are singular: *anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, nothing, no one, one, somebody, someone, and something*.

EXAMPLE **Each** of these lakes **has** good fishing and boating.

- 8e.** The following indefinite pronouns are plural: *both, few, many, and several*.

EXAMPLE **Few** of the trails **are** rocky.

- 8f.** The indefinite pronouns *all, any, more, most, none, and some* may be singular or plural, depending on their meaning in a sentence.

Often, the object in a prepositional phrase that follows the pronoun indicates whether the pronoun is singular or plural. Usually, if the object of the preposition is singular, the pronoun is singular. If the object is plural, the pronoun is plural.

EXAMPLES **Most** of the campground **is** occupied. [*Most* refers to the singular object *campground*.]

Most of the campsites **are** occupied. [*Most* refers to the plural object *campsites*.]

EXERCISE Circle the indefinite pronoun in each of the following sentences. Then, underline the correct form of the verb in parentheses.

Example 1. (Many) of the ocean's creatures (looks, look) strange to us.

1. (Few) of the world's sharks (grows, grow) to be sixty feet long.
2. (One) of the most interesting sharks (is, are) the whale shark.
3. (Each) of a whale shark's eggs (is, are) quite large.
4. (Has, Have) (anyone) here ever seen a whale shark's egg?" asked the tour guide.
5. (None) of the sharks (swims, swim) toward the visitors.
6. (Some) of the other sea creatures (is, are) frightening, too.
7. (Many) of the visitors (screams, scream).
8. (Few) of us (has, have) seen a giant jellyfish before.
9. (Several) of the park's divers (follows, follow) a manta ray.
10. (Everyone) in our class (seems, seem) to be having a good time at the ocean park.

Subject-Verb Agreement F

8g. Subjects joined by *and* usually take a plural verb.

A compound subject that names only one person or thing takes a singular verb.

EXAMPLES **Franco** and **I** **look** for a book about the life of George Washington Carver.

One respected **professor** and **researcher** at Tuskegee Institute **was** George Washington Carver.

8h. Singular subjects joined by *or* or *nor* take a singular verb. Plural subjects joined by *or* or *nor* take a plural verb.

EXAMPLES Neither **poverty** nor any other **hardship** **was** too great an obstacle for Carver.

Neither difficult **times** nor **disappointments** **were** too great an obstacle for Carver.

8i. When a singular subject and a plural subject are joined by *or* or *nor*, the verb agrees with the subject nearer the verb.

EXAMPLE At first, neither the local **farmers** nor Carver's closest **friend** **was** interested in his ideas.

EXERCISE Circle the subjects of the verb in parentheses in each of the following sentences. Then, underline the correct form of the verb in parentheses.

Example 1. (Plants, flowers) and (soil) (was, were) interesting to Carver.

1. (Plants and flowers) (is, are) featured on the cover of this book about Carver's life.
2. The (author and illustrator) of the book (is, are) the same person.
3. According to the book, (grief and sorrow) (was, were) part of Carver's early life.
4. Neither his (mother) nor his (father) (was, were) alive to raise Carver.
5. At the time, (slaveholding and slave trading) (was, were) widespread.
6. Neither (Carver) nor many other (African Americans) (was, were) able to find a college that would enroll them.
7. Neither the large (universities) nor the local (college) (was, were) accepting applications from African Americans.
8. Just (laws and the strict enforcement) of them (was, were) needed.
9. Also described in the book (is, are) Carver's (experiments and discoveries).
10. An innovative (educator and scientist) (was, were) George Washington Carver.

Subject-Verb Agreement G

8j. When the subject follows the verb, find the subject and make sure the verb agrees with it.

EXAMPLES Here **is** the **list** of topics from which you may choose.

When **are** these **books** due back to the library?

EXERCISE A For each of the following sentences, underline the word or word group in parentheses that correctly completes the sentence.

Example 1. When (do, does) the teacher want us to finish the assignment?

1. Why (is, are) your parents going to Beijing?
2. Here (is, are) the magazines you were looking for.
3. (Has, Have) the students returned from their field trip yet?
4. (There is, There are) a snail crawling across the aquarium.
5. Where (is, are) the cat?
6. (Do, Does) all of your brothers and sisters speak Vietnamese?
7. When (was, were) the latest episodes of the program scheduled to begin?
8. There (is, are) many reasons you should read that book.
9. How (do, does) those new shoes feel?
10. Brittany, here (is, are) the books on astronomy you ordered.

EXERCISE B Circle the subject or subjects of the verb in parentheses in each of the following sentences. Then, underline the word or word group in parentheses that correctly completes the sentence.

Example 1. (Has, Have) (anyone) in your family ever learned to water-ski?

11. (Are, Is) your little (brother) a finalist in the state gymnastics tournament?
12. (There's, There are) over forty (species) of birds that pass through my backyard.
13. How (do, does) (bees) make honey?
14. Here (lie, lies) the (ruins) of the colony.
15. When (is, are) your (cousins) from Guatemala coming to visit?
16. (Do, Does) (anyone) here have change for a twenty-dollar bill?
17. There (was, were) no (excuses) for what Dudley had done.
18. What (do, does) the (Andersons) want to know about the school system?
19. (Has, Have) (someone) told you the rules of our game?
20. Here (is, are) (Amy) and her (sisters)!

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Subject-Verb Agreement H

8k. The contractions *don't* and *doesn't* should agree with their subjects.

EXAMPLES These **shoes** **don't** fit me very well.

Doesn't **she** go to your school?

USAGE

EXERCISE A In each of the following sentences, underline the word in parentheses that correctly completes the sentence.

Example 1. This old recording (*don't*, *doesn't*) sound like me.

1. Minneapolis and Toronto (*don't*, *doesn't*) have the climate for palm trees.
2. They (*don't*, *doesn't*) plan to attend the concert tonight.
3. (*Don't*, *Doesn't*) her brothers have a copy of the book?
4. They (*don't*, *doesn't*) plan to go to the reunion.
5. Macaroni and cheese (*don't*, *doesn't*) sound very good to me when I'm sick.
6. Only a few of the choir (*don't*, *doesn't*) know the words to the song.
7. (*Don't*, *Doesn't*) she attend ballet class with your brother?
8. It (*don't*, *doesn't*) matter how you fix the bicycle as long as you do it by Friday.
9. Anyone who thinks cricket is easy (*don't*, *doesn't*) understand the game.
10. (*Don't*, *Doesn't*) everyone wonder about where the stars come from?

EXERCISE B Complete each of the following sentences by inserting the correct contraction, *doesn't* or *don't*, on the line provided.

Example 1. She *doesn't* think she can finish the project on time.

11. Mr. Maduzia *doesn't* know anyone else on the softball team.
12. *Doesn't* someone have the answer to my question?
13. Dr. Anna Kim *doesn't* work at this clinic any longer.
14. Paolo *doesn't* believe in UFOs, but he does believe in ghosts.
15. These ficus plants *don't* look very healthy to me.
16. *Don't* you think we should begin the test now?
17. The video box *doesn't* say who directed the film.
18. He *doesn't* think you should go, does he?
19. The opera *doesn't* seem as long in performance as it did in rehearsal.
20. Anyone who *doesn't* own a dog or a cat wouldn't understand how I feel.

Subject-Verb Agreement I

8I. A collective noun may be either singular or plural, depending on its meaning in a sentence.

The singular form of a *collective noun* names a group of persons, animals, or things. It takes a singular verb when it refers to the group as a unit. It takes a plural verb when it refers to the individual parts or members of the group.

EXAMPLES The **team has been practicing** since March. [The team practices as a unit.]

The **team have been discussing** their strategies with one another. [Individual members discuss with one another.]

EXERCISE A In each of the following sentences, underline the correct form of the verb in parentheses.

Example 1. The orchestra (is, are) rehearsing this afternoon at three o'clock.

- Before each game, the team (practice, practices) their kicks.
- As Napoleon once said, an army (travel, travels) on its stomach.
- The committee generally (decide, decides) on its course of action pretty quickly.
- After the rain, the entire herd (graze, grazes) peacefully along the hillside.
- The Activist Alliance (hold, holds) its annual meeting this week in Fargo.
- As the comedian leaves the stage, the audience (applaud, applauds) wildly.
- The flock (lift, lifts) into the air a few birds at a time.
- The evening before the big battle, the army (clean, cleans) their weapons.
- Our family (has, have) never been able to agree on our destination for summer vacation.
- The team (are, is) receiving awards for their individual achievements.

EXERCISE B On the line provided in each of the following sentences, write the correct present tense form of the verb in parentheses.

Example 1. The crowd surges toward the stage. (surge)

- The team bicker among themselves over who gets to go first. (bicker)
- The committee have gone their separate ways for lunch. (have)
- Every Saturday, the troop present individual projects to their parents. (present)
- The public greets each new CD from Bryn Terfel with even greater acclaim than the one before. (greet)
- The posse discuss which among them would bring the prisoner back to town. (discuss)

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Subject-Verb Agreement J

- 8m.** An expression of an amount (a measurement, a percentage, or a fraction, for example) may be singular or plural, depending on how it is used.

EXAMPLES **Ten dollars was** my weekly allowance when I was twelve years old.

Ten dollars with consecutive serial numbers **were lying** on the counter.

- 8n.** Some nouns that are plural in form take singular verbs.

EXAMPLE **Is mumps** a contagious disease?

Some nouns that are plural in form and that name singular objects take plural verbs.

EXAMPLE Where **are** the **scissors**?

EXERCISE A In the following sentences, underline the verb form in parentheses that agrees with the subject.

Example 1. Twenty percent of the class (is, are) absent today.

1. Fifteen dollars (was, were) a fair price for that teapot.
2. Sixty yards of fabric (is, are) necessary to make the banners for the homecoming parade.
3. Eight percent of the microchips (was, were) defective.
4. Twelve miles (seem, seems) like a long distance if you're walking.
5. About half of the members of the club (was, were) aware of the emergency.
6. The three weeks before Christmas (feel, feels) like forever. *or feel*
7. One quarter of the flour (is, are) reserved for breading the cutlets.
8. Three casseroles (was, were) sitting in a row on the table.
9. Three fourths of the book club's members (has, have) not read the book yet.
10. Four gallons of gasoline (is, are) enough to get us to Grand Rapids and back.

EXERCISE B In the following sentences, underline the verb form in parentheses that agrees with the subject.

Example 1. The news today from Kosovo (is, are) surprisingly good.

11. The Olympics (was, were) in Munich, Germany, that year.
12. Physics (is, are) my first class of the day.
13. (Is, Are) civics the study of the duties and rights of citizenship?
14. As she tips her head forward, Charlene's eyeglasses (slip, slips) down her nose.
15. A summons (was, were) issued for the witness to appear in court the next day.